

TIMES-UNION

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Going top free

Whatever City Court Judge Herman Walz decides in the case of the "Topfree Seven," the women who bared their breasts at Cobb's Hill park last summer, attorneys for one side or the other are likely to carry their constitutional arguments to higher courts. But the highest court of all, in this case, is the court of public opinion. And it seems clear which side is winning.

The defendants demonstrated that clearly when they put the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition into evidence, with its pictures that show models'

breasts covered in a way that satisfies New York law, but revealed in a way that the law was written to prohibit.

And you can see for yourself by visiting any beach on a hot summer day. Swimsuit manufacturers are designing women's suits not to conceal but to reveal, and women are wearing them.

Their purpose is a little different than that of the Topfree Seven, who claim that women's breasts should not be considered as sexual objects. Still, it seems more appropriate for a woman to be seen sunning herself top-free on a beach than for a man to be walking around downtown without a shirt — which is not all that uncommon, at least for young men.

It's unfortunate that Nikki Craft, one of the seven defendants, kept comparing the law that requires women to wear tops to the old laws that once required black people to sit in the back of the bus. To think that women today are in the same situation as blacks in the days of Jim Crow, when

they were barred by law even from attending the schools or buying or renting the homes of their choice, is just plain silly.

But the trial itself was not trivial, for it forced us to confront issues of sex, and the exploitation of sex, in a serious manner.

